1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

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The Setting

The Land and the People

FOR AT LEAST a thousand years the drama of empires rising, falling, expanding, and shrinking has been played out in an immense area of Africa at the southern edge of the Sahara known as the Sudan. These states, Ghana, Mali, Songhai, the Hausa kingdoms, Kanem-Bornu, Baghirmi, Wadai, Darfur, and others like them, from the upper Senegal River basin to the upper Nile, form a band from east to west across Africa. Their histories provide some of the most resplendent grandeur of Africa's past. Many of these states have now been consigned to the history books; Ghana and Mali have disappeared although modern countries have resuscitated their names; Songhai was destroyed by the Moroccans at the end of the sixteenth century; the Hausa states were altered as they came under the hegemony of the Fulani Empire of Sokoto at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and little is known as yet about the early states to the east of Lake Chad. On the other hand, Bornu in the northeastern corner of Nigeria has continued its sovereignty in the Chad Basin throughout a millennium of tribulations and triumphs and it goes on today organized as a separate emirate within Bornu Province.

Like most of the Sudan, Bornu is open savannah country, generally quite flat except for a few stable dunes covered with scrub in the north and several long low ridges running northwest to southeast in the southern part of the country. The ridges are probably ancient lake-shores of a great inland sea whose contemporary remnant is Lake Chad—a large shallow fresh water lake into which flow a number of rivers from the south and west. The soil is sandy and covered with scrub bush grass, and scattered trees, mostly thorny ones, except for the large spreading boabab, which dots the horizon here and there. In the 1930s the Nim, a hardy shade tree from India that thrives on the semi-desert conditions of northern Nigeria, was introduced to provide some forest preserves and year round shade in the villages. Here and there, especially at the bottom of the ridges, are large flat surfaces of hard clay that turn into gray-black mud during the rainy season. These provide clay for building materials and pottery, as well as water holes for the cattle of local villages and wandering nomads.